I'm involved with a business that makes equipment used in broadcast and post production houses; it's in my best interest to speed the adoption of HDTV in any way I can. I can also sympathize with the consumer. It's a nightmare currently for the average guy to figure out what equipment he/she needs to purchase to view HDTV; there are 6 different formats (not including plain old DTV or STV). It's too expensive and too complex for the average consumer at the moment.

Sometimes looking back at history can be of use for decisions that need to be made now. The situation the broadcasters are in is quite similar to the one they were in when the VCR was introduced. They pleaded with the government to save them because this new device which allowed easy, cheap duplication of their content would drive them out of business. It turns out the VCR increased their profitability.

Fact: Anything that can be viewed and listened to can be duplicated (perhaps suffering from some loss of quality).

Assumption: A broadcast flag will not be popular with the general populace. Costly devices will cost more and complexity will increase. A broadcast flag will slow the adoption of DTV/HDTV. Geek's will find an easy way to defeat the flag, then duplicate and distribute out of spite.

If you do decide to implement a broadcast flag, here are some things that you should decide immediately:

- Who can license the technology used to decrypt the media stream? If it's done similarly to DECSS (DVD encryption) then only the big guys can play and free software will not be legally allowed to manipulate such data. This punishes small businesses (and every consumer who has to fork out $150 for a Microsoft license to watch DTV on a computer). Please don't repeat the same mistakes with a broadcast flag. A quote from
http://www.tidbits.com/database-cache/tbart06997.html :

"The obstacle that actually lies in the way of creating a DVD player is the lack of a key to decrypt the CSS encryption used on DVDs. The only way to come by such a key is to sign a contract licensing CSS from the DVD Copy Control Association (DVD CCA), a group made up of companies representing the movie studios, consumer electronics companies, and the computer industry. At $15,500, the licensing cost is not usurious, but the contract effectively prevents individuals and small organizations from licensing CSS. For instance, in the event of a material breach of contract, the licensee is liable for $1 million, and damages can grow to a maximum of $8 million. In addition, the contract prevents licensees from reverse engineering CSS or working in any way counter to the goal of CSS's protection of DVDs."

- What devices must detect the flag? Is it really going to be a flag, or encryption (I assume the latter and it's referred to as a flag to sound friendly). Will you include TV-In cards for computers? Audio recorders? Video cameras? Camera's? Hearing aids? Please don't let this get out of hand (well ironically I'm kind've hoping you do and the populace becomes enraged thereby enacting change... But I digress).

Don't bow to the needs of corporations while sacrificing the needs of individuals. The broadcast flag is not for the greater good, and unencrypted HDTV content will not lead to George Lucas' poverty contrary to

what he thinks.

James Meadlock